

“The Epigraphic Coin Reform of Abd Al-Malik 685-705 C.E.”

New Jersey Numismatic Society

Jeff Burke

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I. INTRODUCTION

TONIGHT I WILL BE PRESENTING AN OVERVIEW OF HOW CALIPH ABD AL-MALIK EXPERIMENTED WITH USING THE FIRST ISLAMIC COINAGE.

(DISPLAY MAP OF THE CALIPHATE IN 705 CE, FROM SPAIN TO AFGHANISTAN)—NOTE HOW ISLAM SPREAD INTO THE FORMER TERRITORIES OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE AND THE SASANIAN DYNASTY IN PERSIA. INITIALLY, MUSLIMS WERE USING THE ALREADY EXISTING COINAGE. I WILL EXPLAIN HOW THE ISLAMIC CALIPHATE CAME UP WITH ITS OWN DISTINCTIVE STYLE OF ISLAMIC COINAGE.

2. CHART OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE (PASS OUT—SOURCES ON BACK)

3. TRANSLATE MY CALLIGRAPHY LITHOGRAPH FROM TURKEY

II. NOW, I WILL DISCUSS SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT CALIPH ABD AL-MALIK AND HIS COINAGE REFORM

1. THE WORD “CALIPHATE” IS FROM THE ARABIC WORD *KHALIFA*, REFERRING TO BOTH SUCCESSOR TO THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND THE “DEPUTY” OF ALLAH
2. MARKOWITZ STATES THAT AT THE TIME OF ABD AL-MALIK, THE CIRCULATING COINAGE IN ARABIA WAS A MIXTURE OF BYZANTINE GOLD AND COPPER----AND SASANIAN SILVER
3. THE BYZANTINE GOLD SOLIDUS, ABOUT 4.5 GRAMS, MAINTAINED A HIGH STANDARD OF PURITY, AND WAS ACCEPTED EVERYWHERE—ALTHOUGH OBVERSE IMPERIAL PORTRAITS VARIED, THE STANDARD REVERSE WAS A CROSS ON THREE STEPS, WHICH SERVED AS THE DENOMINATION MARKER
4. THE SASANIAN SILVER *DRACHM* OR *DIRHAM*, 4.1 GRAMS, WAS STRUCK ON A BROAD, THIN FLAN, AND ALSO HAD A REPUTATION FOR QUALITY
5. IN 685 CE, ABD AL-MALIK IBN MARWAN BECAME THE FIFTH CALIPH OF THE UMAYYAD DYNASTY (NINTH CALIPH IN THE LINE OF SUCCESSORS TO THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD)—20 YEAR REIGN—ESTABLISHED ARABIC AS

THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE MUSLIM WORLD---SET A PATTERN FOR ISLAMIC COINAGE THAT PERSISTS TO THE PRESENT

6. ABD AL-MALIK'S GOLD COINAGE WAS DEVELOPED THROUGH A PERIOD OF GRADUAL EXPERIMENTATION, BEGINNING WITH ABOUT 691---WITH AN ADAPTATION OF THE DESIGN OF A BYZANTINE *SOLIDUS* [**REPEAT INFORMATION**] OF HERACLIUS—WHO DIED IN 641 AD. —THE OBVERSE HAS NO INSCRIPTION AND FEATURES THREE STANDING FIGURES IN LONG ROBES HOLDING GLOBULAR OBJECTS—**AN EXAMPLE OF ABD AL-MALIK'S "THREE KINGS" SOLIDUS BROUGHT ALMOST \$500,000 IN A 2010 SWISS AUCTION**
7. ACCORDING TO DR. TREADWELL, ABD AL-MALIK'S DECISION TO STRIKE SILVER AND GOLD COINAGE WAS TO UTILIZE BULLION THAT HAD BEEN SEIZED AS WAR BOOTY AND TO FUND HIS EMERGING STATE.

III. NEXT, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT TWO EXAMPLES OF ABD AL-MALIK'S GOLD COINAGE:

1. BOTH COINS WERE ISSUED IN DAMASCUS **ALTHOUGH THERE WERE 16 MINTS THROUGHOUT GREATER SYRIA.**
2. **THEY WERE ISSUED WITHIN ONE YEAR OF EACH OTHER**
3. ACCORDING TO THE ROMAN CALENDAR, THE YEAR WAS 696-697
4. ACCORDING TO THE MUSLIM CALENDAR-- **THE CLOCK WAS RESET IN THE YEAR 622 WHICH IS THE BEGINNING OF YEAR 1 IN THE MUSLIM CALENDAR—SO THESE COINS WERE MINTED IN 76-77 AH**
5. **622 CE MARKS THE HIJRA DATE OF WHEN THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND HIS FOLLOWERS MOVED FROM MECCA TO MEDINA**
6. BOTH COINS ARE THE SAME SIZE—THE SIZE OF A BRITISH PENNY THOUGH A BIT HEAVIER
7. EXTANT EXAMPLES THAT I KNOW OF ARE FOUND IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM AND THE ANS COLLECTION

****SHOW ONE COIN AT A TIME**

- A. **STANDING CALIPH DINAR**

APPEARED AROUND 694; ON THE OBVERSE, A BEARDED, LONG-HAIRED FIGURE IN ARAB DRESS HOLDING A **SHEATHED SWORD**.

THE SURROUNDING TEXT REPEATS THE MUSLIM PROFESSION OF FAITH:

(READ TOP RIGHT AND AROUND) “*BISM ALLAH LA ILAH ILLA ALLAH WAHDA LA SHARIK LAHU MUHAMMAD RASUL ALLAH*” (IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THERE IS NO GOD BUT ALLAH ALONE, HE HAS NO ASSOCIATE; MUHAMMAD IS THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH)

****(IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT “ALLAH” IS THE TERM USED TO DESCRIBE GOD BY ARABIC SPEAKING CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS**

--THE REVERSE RETAINS THE COLUMN ON THREE STEPS, BUT THE ISLAMIC CALENDER DATE IS WRITTEN OUT:

(READ TOP RIGHT AND AROUND) “IN THE NAME OF GOD THIS DINAR WAS STRUCK IN THE YEAR SEVENTY FIVE”
THESE COINS, ON THE 4.5 GRAM SOLIDUS WEIGHT STANDARD, WERE STRUCK FOR ONLY ABOUT TWO YEARS.

****MANY SCHOLARS HAVE ADDRESSED THE QUESTION OF WHY THE CALIPH SWITCHED TO AN ARABIC SCRIPT ONLY STYLE OF COIN DESIGN---QUITE A FEW REASONS HAVE BEEN PUT FORWARD:**

- A. ABD AL MALIK’S ADMINISTRATORS WERE UNABLE TO COME UP WITH A NUMISMATIC ICONOGRAPHY SUITABLE TO THE POPULACE
- B. THERE MAY HAVE BEEN DISAPPROVAL OF HAVING A CALIPHAL IMAGE ON A COIN
- C. A THIRD REASON PROPOSED WAS TO PROVIDE A CLEAR DISTINCTION/BREAK FROM BYZANTINE ICONOGRAPHIC COINAGE
- D. FOURTH REASON--TO DEMONSTRATE THE ISLAMIC EMPIRE WAS NOT CENTERED ON THE EMPEROR BUT RATHER ON THE QURAN
- E. A FIFTH POSSIBILITY WAS A RESPONSE AND CHALLENGE TO EMPEROR JUSTINIAN II, WHO HAD PLACED THE IMAGE OF JESUS ON THE OBVERSE OF HIS GOLD COINAGE

B. IN 697 (77 AH) THERE WAS A RADICAL REDESIGN, ELIMINATING ALL PICTORIAL ELEMENTS FROM THE GOLD *DINAR* WITH A SWITCH TO **EPIGRAPHY**. EACH SIDE NOW BORE A CIRCULAR INSCRIPTION AROUND THREE LINES OF ARABIC TEXT.

THE OBVERSE READS:

“THERE IS NO GOD BUT GOD ALONE, HE HAS NO ASSOCIATE,”

(**START RIGHT SIDE AT THREE O-CLOCK--IN THE MIDDLE WITH**)
“MUHAMMAD IS THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH, HE SENT WITH HIM
GUIDANCE AND THE TRUE RELIGION TO MAKE IT VICTORIOUS OVER
EVERY RELIGION (*QURAN*, 9:33)

THE REVERSE READS: ALLAH IS ONE, ALLAH IS ETERNAL, HE DID NOT BEGET AND HE WAS NOT BEGOTTEN,”

SURROUNDED BY THE PHRASE---(START AT TOP @ ONE O'CLOCK—GO RIGHT) *BISM ALLAH DURIBA HADHA AL-DIRHAM FI SANAT SABA WA SAB IN*
(IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THIS DINAR WAS STRUCK IN THE YEAR 77)

ACCORDING TO TREADWELL, ABD AL-MALIK'S EPIGRAPHIC (**NON-PICTORIAL**) COINAGE WAS A SIMPLE UNIFORM PATTERN MEANT TO BE A DOMINANT THEOCRATIC MESSAGE IN ARABIC

PAUSE—NOW I WILL TURN TO COLLECTING

1. FOR COLLECTING THE EARLIEST ISLAMIC COINS—MARKOWITZ STATES THAT ARAB-BYZANTINE COPPERS ARE COMMON, AND CAN OFTEN BE FOUND IN G-VF FOR UNDER \$100---ALTHOUGH RARE TYPES IN EXCEPTIONAL CONDITION ARE MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE
2. ARAB-SASANIAN SILVER *DIRHAMS* OFTEN SELL FOR UNDER \$100; A FEW RARE TYPES REACH THE LOW THOUSANDS
3. POST-REFORM UMAYYAD GOLD COINAGE IS RELATIVELY PLENTIFUL, EXCEPT FOR THE FIRST YEAR OF ISSUE (AH 77) WHICH IS A GREAT RARITY
4. RICHARD PLANT'S LITTLE BOOK ARABIC COINS AND HOW TO READ THEM, (PUBLISHED IN 1980) IS A GOOD INVESTMENT—CHAPTERS 10 & 11 OF THIS BOOK WERE PARTICULARLY HELPFUL TO ME FOR TONIGHT'S TALK --

QUESTIONS?

LIST OF ITEMS NEEDED FOR MY PRESENTATION ON FEBRUARY 20, 2017 @ THE NJNS:

1. Magnifying glass

2. Calligraphy piece from Turkey
3. Chart of the Arabic alphabet
4. My Haywood Arabic dictionary
5. Kitty laser toy
6. My presentation notes and folder of articles
7. Beth's laptop with the Abd Al-Malik coin images
8. My Third Year Arabic files (2) of texts from McGill University
9. *The Islamic World and Patterns of Religion* texts
10. Truth Seeker: The Life of Eric P. Newman, published in 2015--mention his donation of 3,500 medieval Islamic coins to the ANS in the early 1970s (P. 328)

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*Portions of this presentation were originally published in
Folia Orientalia (Yagiellonian University, Krakow: 1995).*

References

MacGregor, Neil. "Coins of Abd al-Malik." Islamic Arts & Architecture, Feb. 14, 2012.

MacGregor was appointed director of the British Museum in 2002, serving in that capacity until his retirement in 2015.

Markowitz, Mike. "Coinage of the First Caliphate." CoinWeek, Dec. 30, 2014.

I received permission from CoinWeek editor Charles Morgan to quote translations from Markowitz's article.

Treadwell, Luke. "Abd al-Malik's Coinage Reforms: The Role of the Damascus Mint." Revue Numismatique, Vol. 165, pp. 357-381, 2009.

Treadwell is a lecturer in Islamic Numismatics at Oxford University.

Map and Photo Credit

Markowitz, Mike. "Coinage of the First Caliphate." CoinWeek, Dec. 30, 2014.

Further Reading

Plant, Richard. Arabic Coins and How to Read Them, 2nd ed. Rotografic, 1980. A 2014 paperback reprint of Plant's volume is also available as a Kindle ebook.





